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Possible Policy Change on Amazon Dams

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POSSIBLE POLICY CHANGE ON AMAZON DAMS

Philip M. Fearnside

A development in January 2018 offers hope of change in policy on energy priorities, although only time will tell the extent to which Amazon dams are foregone. Two key officials -- the executive secretary of the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the head of EPE (Energy Research Enterprise, which is the agency under the Ministry of Mines and Energy responsible for energy planning) -- [stated](#) that the heavy environmental and social impacts of Amazon dams mean that priority should shift to other energy sources, such as wind and solar. However, there was no mention that any of the planned Amazonian dams that are [listed](#) for construction by 2026 would be [cancelled](#).

The stated motive of heavy impacts may not be the key factor, as [economic realities](#) would logically lead to the same policy shift. Contrary to frequent claims by dam proponents, hydropower is not “cheap energy”, even ignoring social and environmental impacts. A worldwide survey shows the normal pattern to be for dams to have much higher financial costs and to take much longer to begin generating power than is thought at the time construction decisions are made (see [here](#)). This is shown by recent cases in Brazil, such as the [Madeira River dams](#) and [Belo Monte](#), which cost more than double the amount officially expected.